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SUBJECT: UNSC: OPEN DEBATE ON MIDDLE EAST - MOST STATES
WELCOME RESOLUTION 1850

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On December 18, the Security Council held its first Open Debate on the Middle East in five months only two days after a ministerial-level Security Council meeting that saw the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1850 which confirms the irreversibility of the bilateral negotiations between the two parties. In addition to a briefing by the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace covering recent developments in Gaza, the West Bank, and the region, the 15 Council members spoke, as well as Israel, the Palestinians, and 15 other member states. Most welcomed the adoption of UNSCR 1850 and the Quartet's December 15 statement and expressed hope for a peace agreement in 2009. Many states called for an improvement of conditions on the ground, especially in terms of humanitarian access to Gaza and a continuation of the "calm." Libya, Syria, Iran, and Cuba came out stridently against Israeli actions. Syria raised the October 26 incident on the Syrian-Iraqi border and termed it unjustified aggression that constituted a serious violation of Syrian sovereignty. The full verbatim transcript of the Council meeting is available on the Security Council's website at www.un.org. End summary.

UNSCO briefing: direct appeal
for calm to be extended

¶2. (SBU) On December 18, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry briefed the Council at the start of its Open Debate on the Middle East. Serry, on behalf of the Secretary-General, made a "direct and urgent appeal for the calm to be respected and extended." He also strongly appealed for "basic humanitarian principles to be continuously observed." He noted the daily average of truckloads of supplies entering Gaza was currently 29, down from 123 in October and 475 in May 2007. He said, "the unprecedented level of closure of crossing points into Gaza has caused unacceptable hardship to the civilian population" and noted that UNRWA had suspended all food distributions. He said that UN projects worth over USD 150 million remain suspended due to a lack of materials. He noted the Secretary-General's letter to his Quartet colleagues outlining his concerns about Gaza and said that the UN continues to "seek more effective communication and cooperation with the Government of Israel, to ensure that the UN is able to execute its mandated programs." On Palestinian reconciliation, he urged Hamas to respond positively to the exhortations of the Quartet and the Security Council to restore Palestinian unity based on PLO commitments. He said, "It cannot be in the interests of the Palestinian people for essential cornerstones of Palestinian legitimacy and national aspirations to be challenged."

West Bank

¶3. (SBU) On the West Bank, he said, "efforts of the Palestinian Authority, together with unprecedented donor support, and improved Israeli-Palestinian security

cooperation are enhancing security and creating prospects for economic improvements." While there were 620 obstacles to movement in the West Bank, he did note the easing of restrictions around Nablus instituted on December 7. He welcomed the Israeli release of 227 Palestinian prisoners and called for the implementation of Quartet Representative Blair's measures and for Israeli action on its Roadmap commitments regarding settlement expansion and refraining from unilateral actions in Jerusalem. He welcomed the Israeli evacuation of the house in Hebron on December 4, condemned the resulting settler violence, and reminded Israel of its obligation to protect the civilian Palestinian population under occupation. He welcomed the Security Council's reaction December 5, commended the restraint of the PA security forces, the efforts by the parties to contain the violence, and noted the forceful denunciation of the settler attacks by Israeli Prime Minister Olmert.

Region and Lebanon

14. (SBU) In the region, Serry said he had held consultations in Damascus, Amman, and Cairo. No further round of Israeli-Syrian indirect talks had taken place. He noted the joint letter from the Saudi Foreign Minister and the Arab League Secretary-General to the U.S. President-elect underscoring the Arab world's continuing commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative. In Lebanon, he noted several isolated security incidents; that Lebanon and Syria had exchanged documents on the locations of their future respective embassies in Damascus and Beirut; and that bilateral visits continued. In terms of preparing for 2009 legislative

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elections, he confirmed that the ten members of the Supervisory Commission on Election Campaign were appointed December 13 by the Lebanese cabinet. While reconstruction continues at the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp, he said the appeal remains under-funded. The UNIFIL area of operations remains quiet, he added.

Palestinian statement

15. (SBU) Palestinian Ambassador Mansour said that the Council's actions in December to address current developments "are welcome and signal reassertion of the Council's authority and its intention to play a more active role in advancing a peace settlement." He welcomed UNSCR 1850 "despite serious misgivings about the exclusionary process and limited scope." He emphasized the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative. He called for a reflection on what happened over the last year that prevented the conclusion of a peace treaty by the end of the year, saying, "Only this will enable us to pinpoint what has gone wrong and to determine what needs to be done henceforth to avoid the pitfalls...." He called for the sharing of the report by U.S. General Fraser with the Quartet and the Council so that it can be known who is upholding their obligations and who is not and what needs to be done to create the appropriate conditions on the ground and between the parties to advance the process towards a two-state solution.

16. (SBU) Ambassador Mansour then called for an end to the "siege of the Gaza Strip" and an opening of the crossings, and for Israel to freeze its settlements and dismantle outposts in the West Bank. He also cited the increased number of obstacles in the West Bank over the last year, while all concerned parties are praising Palestinian Authority security efforts. He called on the Security Council and the Quartet to uphold their responsibilities and to ensure that obligations are met and that the parties refrain from any steps that undermine confidence or prejudice the outcome of negotiations. He expressed appreciation for Egypt's help and for the latest Arab Ministers' meeting's effort to help achieve Palestinian reconciliation. He said

he hoped the cease-fire would be upheld and extended to the West Bank and that "2009 will indeed be the year we bring an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

Israeli statement

17. (SBU) Israeli Perm Rep Shalev opened her statement by noting the substantial progress that had been made in 2008 on the Annapolis framework. She congratulated the Council on the passage of UNSCR 1850 which she said sent a clear message to Hamas that lasting peace will be based on "an enduring commitment to mutual recognition, freedom from violence, incitement, and terror...." She said the real test is with the parties on the ground and noted that Israel is operating on two tracks -- "trying to promote peace with the moderate, responsible leadership on the Palestinian side" and "fighting the extremist Hamas terrorist organization in the Gaza Strip." She said the two parties have demonstrated real courage in the negotiations over the last 13 months. She noted the growing cooperation between the security services in Jenin and Hebron and the opening of more than 20 new Palestinian police stations. She stressed the need to encourage moderates in the region and noted the Israeli decision to release 230 convicted Palestinian prisoners for Eid al-Adha.

18. (SBU) Ambassador Shalev said that serious obstacles remain, namely the 2,900 rockets that were launched from Gaza at Israeli territory in 2008. She noted the incessant attacks targeting crossings and fuel depots that are needed to deliver humanitarian aid into Gaza but said that "Israel acknowledged the need to provide humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, and we do our utmost to facilitate the work of the international community." She noted that CPL Shalit has remained in captivity for 910 days and commented on the rally in Gaza which had mocked his suffering. She said that Iran and Syria remain the epicenter of Hamas' world and that Israel remains concerned by the rearming and redeployment of Hizballah, both north and south of the Litani River. Nevertheless, she stressed that Israel remains fully committed to the peace process because "peace remains the salient goal for the State of Israel."

Council members welcome
adoption of UNSCR 1850

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19. (SBU) The U.S., UK, Italian, French, Burkinabe, Belgian, Russian, Indonesian, Chinese, Costa Rican, South African, Vietnamese, Croatian Perm Reps welcomed the adoption of UNSCR 1850. (Note: U.S. remarks are posted on the Mission's Internet site. The full verbatim transcript of the Council's meeting is available on the Security Council's page on the UN's website, www.un.org. End note.) The UK Perm Rep said that UNSCR 1850 "is an important milestone in a series of resolutions, including 242, 338, 1397, and 1515." Many delegations noted that the real test for UNSCR 1850 will be whether it is implemented. The South African Perm Rep noted, "It is thus imperative that both sides ensure that their actions and pronouncements be calculated to advance the quest for peace." Many delegations, including the U.S., UK, France, and Panama, called on Israel to take action to freeze settlement building and improve conditions for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The British Perm Rep called on Palestinians to find a "way to reunite around negotiations and nonviolence, with Hamas ceasing their rocket attacks and moving towards the Quartet principles." The Russian Perm Rep called for intra-Palestinian agreement on the Quartet criteria and said the matter would be discussed with President Abbas in Moscow.

10. (SBU) China and Costa Rica specifically called for the "calm" to be extended. Both the UK and French Perm Reps

called for an early commitment from the next U.S. administration to sustain the peace process from the start of its term in office. The Burkinabe Perm Rep said he hoped 2009 keeps the spirit of Annapolis alive. As he usually does, the Libyan Perm Rep focused his comments almost exclusively on Israeli practices that violate Palestinian human rights and on Palestinian humanitarian issues. Italian Acting Perm Rep devoted most of his statement to Lebanon, calling for Israel and Lebanon to work with UNIFIL to effect a quick withdrawal from northern Ghajar and for Syria to provide a written confirmation to the SYG of Lebanon's sovereignty over the Sheba'a Farms.

Other parties brief Council:
Syria and Lebanon

¶11. (SBU) The Syrian Perm Rep began his remarks to the Council stressing that Syria has "chosen peace as a strategic option" since its participation in the Madrid Conference. However, he then launched into a litany of Israeli wrongs and abuses in the West Bank and Gaza. He accused Israel of plundering the Golan's natural resources and continuing to bury nuclear waste there. He said that while Syria has entered into indirect talks with Israel, "we would have liked to have agreed on a basis to start direct negotiations under the auspices of multiple international partners, but the matter requires an American will to make peace in the Middle East one of its top priorities." He then turned to the October 26 incident on the Syrian-Iraqi border and said, "this aggression was unjustified and constitutes a serious violation of Syrian sovereignty and of the principles and purpose of the United Nations Charter." He said his government "has appealed to the United Nations and the Security Council in particular to shoulder their responsibilities to prevent the repetition of this serious violation and to lay the responsibility for the killing of innocent Syrian civilians squarely on the aggressors in order to maintain security and stability in the Middle East." At the end of his statement he accused the Israeli Perm Rep of referring to Syria as a funder of Hamas as a way to "divert attention from the root cause of the problem of violence and terrorism in our region, which is the Israeli occupation of Arab territories." He referred to Israel as "imposing an unjust siege and carrying out a sadistic and pathological holocaust against more than 1.5 million people in Gaza and a similar number in the West Bank." (Comment: There was no mention of Lebanon in the Syrian Perm Rep's statement. End comment.)

¶12. (SBU) The Lebanese Perm Rep noted the Council's passage of UNSCR 1850, but commented that it lacks: a specific timeline for the achievement of peace, a clear call to put an end to the Israeli occupation, and a denunciation of Israeli practices against Palestinian civilians. He recalled Israel's settlement expansion, its continued construction of the separation barrier, its obstacles to Palestinian movement in the West Bank, and increased settler violence. He referred to Israeli Foreign Minister Livni's recent statement which he said "brought to mind something similar to the policy of transfer." With regard to Lebanon, he said "Israel continues its stubborn refusal to fulfill all its obligations" under UNSCR 1701. He said Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace totaled more than 1,100 over the last four

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months and called for an immediate cessation of them. Referring to northern Ghajar, Sheba'a Farms, and Kfar Shouba, he called for the UN to "launch a new diplomatic initiative that allows the restoration of the land to its rightful owners and puts an end to the occupation." He referred to statements by the Israeli Prime Minister threatening to "destroy Lebanon," but said Lebanon has chosen to abide by "the choice of a comprehensive and just peace based on the Arab Peace Initiative."

Future Council members, a future permanent member contender, and an unsuccessful SC candidate weigh-in

¶13. (SBU) 2009 Security Council member Turkey welcomed UNSCR 1850 and urged both parties to not take any action that might prejudice or undermine future negotiations. The Turkish Perm Rep quoted recent Nobel Peace Prize winner Martti Ahtisaari that "all conflicts can be settled and there are no excuses for allowing them to be eternal." He pledged that Turkey will continue to work for a comprehensive peace based on a two-state solution and will contribute to the "stability, security, and prosperity of the region." The Japanese Perm Rep, also representing an incoming 2009 Security Council member country, reiterated Japan's strong support for a negotiated two-state solution and welcomed UNSCR 1850 and the Quartet's efforts. He noted Japan's concern for the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and urged that the blockade be lifted; and called for the end of the rocket fire and an extension of the cease-fire. He also called for a freeze on settlement activity and the need for rule of law to counter settler violence. He noted Japan's commitment to Palestinian economic development and noted that it had provided over a billion dollars in assistance since Oslo and would continue to do so.

¶14. (SBU) Permanent Security Council seat contender Brazil also took advantage of the debate to note its ties to the region, including the fact that some 10 million Brazilians trace their roots to the Middle East. The Brazilian Perm Rep welcomed UNSCR 1850 and said the leaders of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and the U.S. bear a special responsibility to assist the Council with its implementation. Iceland, which failed in its bid for a two-year rotation on the Council, addressed the Council as a strong supporter of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security and advocated for greater women's participation in the peace process, especially for proposals by the International Women's Commission for a Just and Sustainable Israeli-Palestinian Peace. The Icelandic Perm Rep said, "The solidarity among women across the lines of conflict can offer inspiration and hope for their societies as a whole and has generated proven added value in the resolution of numerous conflicts."

OIC members: Morocco,
Qatar, Pakistan, Iran

¶15. (SBU) Given Pakistan's own domestic and regional challenges, one might have expected the Pakistani Perm Rep to draw some comparisons between the Middle East and his own region but he did not do so, except when referring to the responsibilities of the "occupying power;" and his intervention made no mention of the challenges of terrorism. He attributed the current situation largely to "Israel's policies and actions," though at the end he did "urge our Palestinian brothers to put aside their differences and pool all their energies in the pursuit of peace." He lamented the lack of progress in negotiations for the past year and gently criticized UNSCR 1850 for not doing "full justice to the gravity of the situation." He did call on the Quartet to "engage more seriously" with the Arab League and with the Organization for the Islamic Conference, which he termed "a key partner for peace efforts in the Middle East."

¶16. (SBU) The Moroccan Perm Rep expressed support for the negotiations, welcomed UNSCR 1850, and said that progress should be protected from rollbacks. The Qatari Perm Rep referred to UNSCR 1850 and said that while it was commendable, it only focuses on principles. He called on the Council to adopt the Arab draft resolution on settlements which is still before the Council "in blue." He went on to criticize Israel for its blockade of Gaza, for turning away vessels bearing humanitarian aid, and for not protecting Palestinians from settler violence. The Iranian Perm Rep criticized the Council for failing to live up to its responsibility to protect Palestinians from increased Israel

settler violence and from Israel's collective punishment in the Gaza Strip. He accused "a permanent member" of the

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Security Council of extending its "unqualified support" to the Israeli regime which has "emboldened the said regime in its war crimes and crimes against humanity." (Note: Israel later replied to Iran's remarks, calling them against the spirit of hopefulness that characterized the remarks made by most delegations. End note.)

Others: Norway, Australia,
Venezuela, Cuba

¶17. (SBU) The Norwegian DPR stressed the importance of economic growth to the political process and a successful settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians. She noted that support from donors has increased. While she criticized increased Israeli settlement activity, she did laud Israel's evacuation of the Hebron house in early December. She said that Norway welcomes UNSCR 1850 and its call on donors to assist in the development of the Palestinian economy and reminded the Council that the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee remains the key instrument for mobilizing and coordinating donor support. The Australian Acting Perm Rep welcomed the December 15 Quartet statement and UNSCR 1850 and pledged Australia's commitment to provide international support for the peace process.

¶18. (SBU) The Venezuelan Perm Rep welcomed UNSCR 1850, co-sponsored by the U.S. and Russia, and urged its broad implementation. He also called for an end to "the ongoing aggression against the Government and people of Palestine" and said that "we must not allow those who have committed crimes of genocide to go unpunished." Cuba, on behalf of the Non-aligned Movement, expressed support for UNSCR 1850 but stressed that the Council still needs to implement the resolution, as well as previous resolutions on the Middle East. Cuba criticized Israel extensively in its statement, stating that Israel had increased unilateral actions in the face of renewed interest in peace efforts, and expressed support for refugees' right-of-return.
Khalilzad